RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

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IRIS DOUGLASIANA
DOUGLAS IRIS

Prepared
by
RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
of the
NATIVE PLANTS OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Ana Canyon
Orange County
California

IRIS DOUGLASIANA

DOUGLAS IRIS

Iridaceae — Iris Family

Perennial 1-2 ft. high, often forming clumps several feet across. Rootstalks (rhizomes) stout, creeping, 1/4-3/8 in. in diam. Leaves equitant, 2-ranked, ½-¾ in. wide. 1-2 ft. long, basal portion reddish, upper dark shiny green. Flowering stems flattened, usually simple bearing 2 or 3 leaflike bracts and 2-3 (rarely 5) flowers. Perianth regular, about 3 in. across, varying from white to lavender or deep purple, variously veined; pedicels 1-1½ in. long; ovary 1-1¼ in. long, 3-celled; perianth tube ½-1 in. long; 3 sepals 2 in. long, spreading, oblanceolate, about 7/8 in. wide, prominently veined on lower half and lightly bearded; petals 3, similar to the sepals but narrower and more erect; stigmas 3, petal-like, 2-lobed at tip, the stigmatic portion hidden by a flap on under surface; stamens 3, each with a broad filament and an anther ½ in. long, these closely appressed to the stigmas and inconspicuous; mature capsules 1½-2½ in. long, sharply angled, containing numerous nearly globose seeds about 1/8 in. in diameter.

The genus Iris (Greek word for rainbow) contains over 100 species from all continents, but mainly from the north temperate zone. At least 25 species are known from the United States, of which 8 to 10 are found in California. Iris Douglasiana, discussed here, was named in 1841 by Rev. Wm. Herbert, an English student of the group, and honors David Douglas an early explorer in California. The original specimens were probably obtained in the vicinity of Monterey. The Douglas Iris is found from Southern Oregon to Monterey Co., Calif., and is restricted to an area along the coast roughly parallel to the Redwood belt. The plants are equally at home among the Redwoods or on the exposed coastal bluffs. Plants from sheltered spots are taller, often standing 2½ ft. high, while those from the open are much shorter. Greatest profusion of flowers are usually to be found on the plants of the exposed areas. Great diversity of flower color is exhibited throughout its range, although some areas display but a single shade. Fine stands are to be found along the coast, especially south of San Francisco and on the Marin County bluffs. Old colonies that have been undisturbed for years form raised mounds many feet across, thus displaying their flowers well above the surrounding grasses.

Many of the numerous color variants of the Douglas Iris

have been given botanical names, the first appeared in 1841 as vars. bracteata and nuda. In 1897 Carl Purdy described Iris Watsoniana from specimens collected at Eureka. This species is the dark purple form found on the Mendocino and Humboldt coasts and is probably the same as the var. bracteata mentioned above, but should not be confused with Iris bracteata of Southern Oregon. The most recently named race was published as var. oregonensis by Foster in 1936. Since most of these various forms of the Douglas Iris are of horticultural interest and are easily propagated vegetatively it is of some value to have names for them.

Cultivation of the Douglas Iris is as easy and satisfactory as most of the well known garden irises. The rhizomes should be obtained in the early fall and planted in sunny or partially shaded spots. They will thrive in almost any garden soil but are not happy either in too dry or too boggy situations. After several years the clumps should be separated to insure proper flowering. They may also be grown from seeds, but several years are required to produce flowers. The two strains which we have at the Garden were obtained by digging small quantities of rhizomes in the wild in 1931. The pale lavender strain came from the Santa Cruz Mts.; the deep purple (I. Watsoniana) was obtained on the Mendocino Co. coast. Both have grown equally well under our conditions and have been divided to form many hundreds of clumps. Ours usually bloom early in April and continue for about three weeks. As a cut flower the Douglas Iris is very acceptable if picked when the first flower on each stem is just opening. Their gracefulness of shape and delicacy of color make them of value where the huge flowers of the German irises are not desirable. In fact, they are better compared to the Dutch and Spanish bulbous irises, but are more easily cultivated.

Douglas Iris has long been a highly prized species in cultivation in many parts of the world, but is seldom seen in abundance in California gardens. Plants are easily obtained from dealers in iris who have assembled the most outstanding color forms. In many areas in the wild the species is so abundant that there is little danger of depleting the supply by digging a few plants for one's garden, but it should always be remembered that these stands are on private land and that the permission of the owners must be obtained.

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

Of The Native Plants of California.

Established 1927

In Memory of John W. Bixby

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Purpose: A scientific institution devoted to the growth and study of the native plants of California for their botanical, horticultural and popular features.

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MAIL ADDRESS

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